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ABSTRACT

This case study identifies the leadership styles of an experienced principal in his first year at a new position within a rural school cooperative. "Fred" is a 33-year-old male who was hired by the school system to bring in current instructional methods and management techniques, encourage student involvement, and strengthen the academic program. Data collection methods used were an interview guide, observation, and artifact collection. Changes initiated by the new principal included: (1) evaluating teaching strategies and providing inservice training; (2) organizing committees to develop new instructional objectives; (3) adopting a plan for "progressive discipline"; and (4) soliciting input from the community. Leadership style was analyzed in terms of authority and power within the school organization. Fred used the authority modes identified as charismatic, traditional, expert, and legal in various combinations throughout his school relationships. He preferred to use methods based on trust and expert knowledge, but, with reticent staff members, he used the power devices of "keeping to the contract" or "bestowing of technical resources." Leadership workstyles can be divided into four orientations which typify the principal's function in the school organization. Fred exhibited a leadership workstyle and saw himself as a staff motivator. While encouraging exploration of new teaching methods, his focus was not on technical tasks, but on overall performance. (KS)

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THE MODERNIZATION OF A RURAL SCHOOL:

A LEADERSHIP RESEARCH STUDY

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THE MODERNIZATION OF A RURAL SCHOOL: A LEADERSHIP RESEARCH STUDY

Introduction and Purpose

This paper is a study of educational leadership styles. The purpose of this study is to characterize leadership exhibited by the research subject, a new principal.

Methodology

For the purpose of leadership study data collection, a single-subject case study was conducted by two researchers. The criteria for subject selection were as follows:

1) must be an experienced administrator,

2) must currently be a building principal,

3) must not have been in his current position for more than two years,

4) must not have been previously employed in the district.

Data collection methods include the use of an interview guide, observation and artifact collection.

Narrative

Overview of School and Community

The school district of the research subject is a wheat farming community on the eastern side of Washington State. Two adjacent towns have populations of about 500, mostly wealthy farmers and their families. The community focus is directed on the schools as centers of recreation and civic interest. Athletic teams who have consistently gone on to State Championships have formed a cohesive bond among the citizenry.

In 1987, the two communities decided to institute a new system of school administration and formed a school cooperative. The K-2 grades and the middle school are located in one of the communities and in the other are the 3-5 grades and the high school. Each town has an administrative assistant/principal who administers programs within his community. A superintendent supervises and has sole control of the budget for the entire cooperative district. Busing between the towns allows for the transportation of students to the different buildings. Each principal administers a school system which has aprox. 180 students.

Background of the Research Subject

The research subject, hereafter identified as Fred, was hired as an administrative assistant/principal one year ago. Considering his youth, he comes to the district with considerable prior administrative experience. He is an enthusiastic, articulate, and relaxed educator whose career goal is eventual employment as a superintendent in a large, urban school district. A deeper examination of Fred's background follows.

Fred is a white male, 33 years old and married with two children. He was raised in a rural community and gained early admittance to Eastern Washington University. He graduated with a degree in Communications and Secondary Education at the age of 21.

Upon acquiring a Washington State Teaching Certificate, Fred was employed by a rural school system as a teacher of English and Media Communications at a high school with aprox. 500 students. After 5 years of classroom instruction, during which time he took a year off to study and travel, Fred was appointed to the position of Assistant Principal. Concurrently, he completed a Master's Degree in Educational Administration and received an Administrative Certificate.

Subsequently, Fred moved to a new district where he was hired as an assistant principal at a high school with a student body of about 1500. After two years, he advanced to become the principal of an alternative school for one year, and was then named Assistant Superintendent for a year in the same school district. His current position is Administrative Assistant/K-12 Principal.

Influence of School Board Values

Prior to Fred's employment in the school cooperative, a decision was made by the community that a change or updating of their schools was in order. Being a well-educated constituency, it became obvious that a school system which had not been modified for the last 40 years must be in need of reorganization and redirection. The merging of two small districts for the purpose of reorganizing the school structure was accompanied by a mandate from the school board to "seek new blood," to bring in current instructional methods and management techniques, encourage student involvement, and strengthen academic program.

During Fred's employment interview, the newly appointed superintendent made clear the need for a new focus in the schools with an understanding that change must be initiated as soon as possible but with the least amount of disruption to the educational process. Fred was anxious tp proceed with this mandate but made clear his stipulation that the superintendent "just let me run the school."

Fred also indicated that he would not be remaining long in this position as his main motivation for seeking employment in the area was the town's proximity to the university and the corresponding opportunity to gain a Superintendent's Endorsement.

Changes Initiated by the New Principal

Fred spent the first month touring the district and communities in order to get a feel for the school organization he had inherited. Realizing that in a small town he had "to get his ducks in order" before making any changes, he sought to understand the existing social order and structure. He enlisted the aid of two older teachers who expressed enthusiasm with his appointment and evinced instructional methods of which he approved.

Within a month, Fred told his teaching staff of 15 exactly what his goals were for the buildings and what methods he wanted used to accomplish them. Using the arguement that "what's good for the kid is good for the school," he began to evaluate the teaching strategies of individual teachers and instituted a program of in-service training. He also organized committees to develop new instructional objectives with the specific intent of raising academic expectations and emphasizing scholarship throughout his buildings.

Fred also began a committee to study the results of the district's Metropolitan Achievement Test scores in order to discover areas of academic weakness and deficiency. The committee was also assigned the task of developing some possible methods of raising these test scores, as well as a general goal of increasing an awareneess of the importance of scholarship to the educational process. Previously, the focus of the schools had been on the athletic program.

To deal with discipline at the building level, especially at the high school, Fred adopted a plan for Progressive Discipline. This involved setting limits and specific consequences for each infraction, including parent conferences and short-term suspensions. Notification of these new procedures was accomplished by distribution of letters, student forums, and parent meetings.

A series of public forums were organized in order to solicit input from the community, particularly from parents. Also, these occasions were used to disseminate information about the new procedures which had been implemented. The new plan for student discipline was explained and the student handbook was totally revised. The organization of a parent-student-teacher association was begun: a new idea that had never been tried before. Fred reitierated time and again "I need your help...and we're going to do this together."

Interactions with Building Staff

One of the first areas of disagreement among staff members was the establishment of a Parents' Night in order to bring the community into the school and explain the goals and expectations of the new administration. While the majority of teachers were open to this idea, two stalwart holdouts vocalized their concerns and declared that they would not participate. Rather than confront these teachers before the entire staff, Fred later called each of the dissenters into his office separately in order to determine the reasons for their objections. One felt that the requirement of extra work hours would be a dangerous precedent, especially since the teachers were not required to attend evening school functions. Fred asked the teacher to "trust me. This is in the best interest of our kids." The other staff member expressed reservations and anxiety at having to present a program of course objectives to the parents, and perhaps having to justify classroom methods. Fred worked individually with this teacher to allay these fears.

While the majority of the staff was supportive of the new procedures and new instructional objectives, there was some opposition from teachers of long tenure, most with between 12 amd 25 years in district. The change in focus was not readily accepted by this faction, especially since different staff evaluation criteria was being formulated. A

few of the old guard had applied for Fred's job and were disgruntled by his appointment. Many of this group developed a "sit and wait" posture and greeted program changes with wariness. Fred began developing the impression among his teachers of unique capability for his position and advised them to "hop on board whenever you're ready, as long as it's soon!"

Future Goals of the Principal

Fred expresses some concern with the goals he had not been able to accomplish or set in motion during his first year as principal. He still wants to involve the students to a greater degree in school decision-making by starting Associated Student Bodies at both his buildings. He has assigned top priority to this project for the coming year.

The establishment of a scope and sequence adopted by the district cooperative is another prime objective. He sees the lack of continuity from building to building as a distinct disadvantage for the students. Fred hopes to work closely with the other principal in order to define a strategy for compatible objectives.

Fred would also like to acquire more control over the building budget. Currently, all monetary decisions are made and controlled by the district superintendent. The purchasing of supplies and the dispensing of funds for in-service activities are two items which Fred would prefer to direct.

Another area of particular focus for next year will be to change the perspectives of parents in regard to the academic program of their children. He expresses disappointment with parents who do not seem to value education or give it top priority. The development of parent education programs are high on Fred's list.

A final area for future development might be in the establishment of greater decision-making within the teacher ranks. Fred would like to be able to ask for staff advice on specific building needs, and he sees the need to delegate more authority to study groups for project implementation.

Analytical Framework

Theoretical models of leadership styles and the influence of authority/power modalities on organizational action will be used to support conclusions based on the data. The orientation of the administrator toward the nature of teaching and the general mission of the school will be considered (Mitchell, Ortiz, Mitchell, 1987).

Leadership workstyles can be divided into four orientations which typify the principal's function in the school organization. An administrative mode describes principals who concentrate on encouraging professionals, i.e. teachers. The chief duty is to provide support and organization to various school elements. The leadership mode directs a principal to be an inspirational leader who

seeks to motivate teachers and tends to view teaching as a spontaneous, sensitive art form. The principal who demonstrates a supervision orientation concentrates on directing and guiding teacher work and insists on the responsible planning of school tasks. These administrators display little trust in their subordinates' competency. A management work orientation is evidenced when a principal concentrates on the execution of programs and technical teacher tasks, placing emphasis on training and careful coordination of specific instructional goals (Mitchell, Ortiz, Mitchell, 1978, p.148).

A single principal may display any or all elements of these work orientations depending on the specific situation or his changing view in regard to the school's overall mission, also known as his project. In order to achieve his goals, a principal must take decisive measures, or action, in order to insure the participation of his teachers.

Principals may use various degrees of authority and power to enlist staff in advancing their project for the school. Social control involves two elements; power and authority respectively (Mitchell and Spady, 1983). Authority in leadership involves getting others to voluntarily support a principal's project solely on the basis of perceived intrinsic rewards. Power as a leadership function, on the other hand, involves getting others to comply either voluntarily or involuntarily through the use of rewards or punishments.

When educational leadership is associated with authority, interpersonal relationships between leader and follower need to be established and maintained in order to encourage feelings of intimacy and/or security for the subordinate. Arising out of these relationships are tangible and intangible evidence that the subordinate is accepted and supported by the authority figure.

When leadership is associated with power, the actions of the leader are seen as either reward or punishment. The use of rewarding resources typically elicits voluntary behavior on the part of the followers. The use of punishing resources by the leader results in involuntary behavior. When leadership is associated with authority, only voluntary social controls are induced whereas leadership associated with power entails both voluntary and involuntary forces (Mitchell and Spady, 1983).

Authority relationships can be divided into four modes: charismatic, traditional, legal and expert. Under each mode there are varying subjective experiences. For example, within the mode of charisma, intimacy is experienced. Expertise elicits the experience of adequacy, tradition brings worthiness, and legality leads to security.

In a similar manner, power relationships between leader and follower can be divided into four resource modes: pyschological, tschnical, moral and contractual. Within each mode there exist corresponding reward and punishment

resources. For example, when reward-producing psychological resources are used by the leader, the follower experiences acceptance. Conversely, when punishment resources are used, rejection is felt. The use of technical resources as rewards elicits feelings of potency within the follower. Punishment resources in this mode result in a feeling of manipulation. In moral resources, reward produces honor while punishment produces shame. Finally, in the mode of contractual resources, reward produces autonomy while punishment produces a sense of coercion.

Developing educational authority as a controlling mechanism for subordinates necessitates the nurturing of the relationship between principal and teacher. Whether the administrator develops his/her role perception as a charismatic leader or invokes traditional leadership values, the principal encourages an emotional investment in his/her vision. The more rational employee may deem expertise or perceived legal perogatives as the enticing factor in adopting a principal's project.

Those principals who cannot secure participation of staff based on authoritative modes must rely on both positive and negative power plays to control errant teachers. The use of contractual pressures are seen as the most forceful display of power and are interpreted by followers as intimidation, which could lead to rebellion. Much preferred are psychological entreaties and moral

judgements which serve as intrinsic motivators. Also, the use of technical resources can sometimes be utilized to incorporate within the staff a feeling of community and vested interest in the leader's project.

Analysis

"I like being in a small district because I can develop a relationship with staff and students." This introductory statement indicates that the subject, Fred, wants to interact with staff members on a personal level in order to aid implementation of his project. His perception of the importance of intimacy in professional relationships is reflected in his use of charisma as a mode of authority. However, it is noted that Fred uses all the authority modes depending on the situation or when he perceives a threat to his goals.

Whole group participation in his project is enjoined as a professional duty with a connotation of implied value to education, which is a mode of traditional authority. At a faculty meeting, Fred uses statements such as, "I think professionally we ought to do this...," and seeks acknowledgement of his project's validity by some demonstration of group support. When dissenters are identified, however, Fred's action is to employ a "divide and conquer" display of power. Should this tactic fail to induce compliance, then another power mode is evidenced

which involves contractual resources. A typical statement might be, "Have it done by (such and such a date) or else I'll write you up."

Fred emphasizes, "I like to hire experienced teachers. I will not hire a first-year teacher." He prefers experienced personnel over those who would necesitate training and expenditures of quantities of his time. This provides additional insight into the principal's leadership style. He sees himself as a motivator rather than a teacher-trainer. He elaborates on his view of teachers by declaring, "They are to be facillitators in the learning process. They are not merely to pass out textbooks." The instructional styles Fred looks for in teachers further demonstates his orientation toward education.

The affective qualities of the school climate are seen by Fred as the most important things he has changed during his first year. He is proud to relate that, "Staff morale is the highest ever. Kids like to come to school more now. Parents talk about the academic aspects of school rather than just sports." Staff morale, student pride in the school, and the shift in community focus from athletics to academics are all indicators to Fred that he has made an impact on the affective relationship between school personnel and the students/community. To achieve staff, student and community "buy in" of his project, the subject has employed a traditional mode of authority and used moral

resources as well. An appeal was made to building staff to "come on board" based on personal pride and support for the community's interests. The principal attempts to get a personal and moral commitment to his project. His leadership style is to inspire them "with a vision of the purposes of education and the possibilities of children "(Mitchell, Ortiz, Mitchell, 1987, p.149).

Teacher in-service training is provided to increase their technical knowledge. The subject hopes that through such in-service his teachers will be exposed to a wider variety of teaching styles and that such exposure will increase creativity. Fred reiterates, "Teachers are facillitators. I hate teachers who give red marks for mistakes and rely on the basal. I never used a textbook."

Fred spent time observing at the elementary level, (his level of least expertise), while directing change at the secondary level, (the level at which he is most knowledgeable). Stability of the elementary organization is maintained by the use of traditional and charismatic authority modes. At the elementary building he relies on the experience of two older female teachers to keep him informed as to the existing program, procedures, calendar events and social relationships. He often asks, "What's coming up next?" and encourages continuity of traditional building ceremonies. At the secondary level, expertise and legality are the chief modes of authority used. Control is

maintained and change directed from his base of expertise, secondary education. While legality was also used in the form of a revised handbook of student discipline to gain acceptance of his project by students and parents, he focuses his attention on a legal rationale of fairness and justice that prevails in the community. Fred seeks to consolidate parental support for his project as well as for the mission of the school.

Although Fred's project and intent have the same focus at both elementary and secondary levels, his actions are dissimilar. At the high school he seeks to innovate curriculum with blatant disregard for traditional norms. Whereas at the elementary level he maintaines ceremonial rituals within the building so as not to disturb the statu quo. This dichotomy seems to stem from his desire to undertake change within only one organizational structure at a time.

In-service training, supplies and equipment are used as contractual/technical resources to gain support for his project from reluctant teachers. He state that "I'm going to push for more building-based budgeting with the superintendent." Fred feels that by controlling the purse strings he can provide more benefits and incentives to staff members, thereby increasing his leverage to win their compliance. The use of contractual/technical resources are two modes of power the subject relies on within his leadership orientation.

Fred demonstrates most of the characteristics of the leader in regard to workstyle and his projection of the school's overall mission (Mitchell, Ortiz, Mitchell, 1987). His view of the school is a place where teachers are emotionally involved and students are excited about learning. He wants enthusiasm evident among the teachers and an indication of satisfaction with their positions. The teacher role is primarily seen as a facilitator to learning and the student's role as one of explorer. In terms of Mitchell's construct, the principal's vision is oriented toward "schooling as the execution of tasks" and "teaching as dedicated effort".

Summary Conclusions

This leadership study has attempted to identify the leadership styles of an experienced principal in his first year at a new position within a rural school cooperative. At the same time, an analysis has been made of the principal's use of authority and power within the school organization.

Fred demonstrates use of authority modes identified as charismatic, traditional, expert and legal in various combinations throughout his school relationships. He prefers to use methods based on trust and expert knowledge, but does not flinch from using the power devices of keeping to the contract or bestowing of technical resources.

The analysis has shown that Fred exhibits the traits within his workstyle of a leader and sees himself as a staff motivator. He seeks to inspire his teachers to become creative, sensitive, child-centered instructors who engage children with energy. While encouraging exploration of new teaching methods, his focus is not on technical tasks but rather on overall performance.

Fred will not remain long in his present position. He typifies himself as a career-bound administrator (Carlson, 1972) and realizes his current position will only last a year or two longer before he achieves as much of his project as possible. He then hopes to advance to a larger, urban school system as a superintendent and begin a new project of district-wide motivation and instructional reorganization.

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